2470

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT

KNARESBOROUGH,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF

THE SUNDAY SCHOOLS,

June 29th, 1793.

BY SAMUEL CLAPHAM, M.A.

VICAR OF BINGLEY.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

WILLIAM CLEAVER, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER.

My Lord,

THE following diſcourſe to which your Lordſhip, with the moſt obliging condeſcenſion, has been pleaſed to permit me to prefix your name, was written without the moſt diſtant idea of publication. If in addreſſing myſelf to the underſtanding and ſenſibility of my auditors, I had employed more copious or more powerful arguments, I ſhould only have repeated without neceſſity, what has been already urged by other preachers with happy and marked effect. But as the Sunday-Schools at Knareſborough have been inſtituted for nearly eight years, my hearers were fully convinced of their utility—and as many Sermons have been preached in their behalf, the common topics of exhortation to charity had been, in all probability, exhauſted. I therefore confined myſelf to ſuch obſervations as ſuggeſted themſelves to my mind from the diſcharge of my own parochial duty, and from the ſuperintendence of a Sunday-School, which I had the happineſs of eſtabliſhing in this place. In regard to the compoſition of my Sermon I have ſought neither the approbation of the learned, nor the applauſe of the polite; my ſole object was to appeal to the conſcience and to the boſom of each individual hearer. In making that appeal, I ſpoke only what I felt; and I ſpoke plainly, becauſe I felt ſincerely.

I know,

I know, my Lord, how eminently qualified you are to judge of thoſe writings which are really diſtinguiſhed by originality of ſentiment, and by elegance of diction; but I, alſo, know that your candour is equal to your taſte and your erudition; and that, in the ſacred cauſe of morality and religion, you prefer the native ſimplicity of truth to the artificial ſplendour of ornament. Permit me, then, to hope, that, in peruſing theſe pages, you will look to the intention, rather than the abilities of the writer; and that you will pardon me for confiding in your virtues as a Prelate, where I dare not aſpire to your commendation as a critic.

I ſhould not have written this ſermon, if I had not been deſired to preach at Knareſborough—I ſhould not have permitted it to go into the world, if my friends had not been of opinion that the publication of it might be of ſome uſe—I ſhould not have ventured to dedicate it to the Bishop of Chester, if I had not been convinced of his readineſs to encourage the profeſſional exertions, and excuſe the literary defects of every Clergyman who is ſeriouſly intent upon correcting the errors, improving the morals, and confirming the faith of the poor, the ignorant, and the friendleſs.

I am, my Lord,

with the highest respect

your Lordship's most dutiful

and obliged servant,

S. CLAPHAM.

Yarm, Auguſt 3d, 1793.

SERMON, &c.

PSALM 102.——Verſe 18.

THIS SHALL BE WRITTEN FOR THOSE THAT COME AFTER, AND THE PEOPLE THAT SHALL BE BORN SHALL PRAISE THE LORD.

THE Pſalm from which theſe words are taken was compoſed, as ſome perſons conjecture, by one of the Prophets, towards the latter end of the captivity—or rather perhaps after the return of the Jews from Babylon to their own country: after lamenting the miſerable eſtate of Jeruſalem, the author, from a conviction of the eternity and immutability of God, predicts with confidence the reſtoration of Zion, when "the fulneſs of the Gentiles ſhall come in. This covenant of "peace," ſays he, "ſhall be written for thoſe that come after, and the "people that ſhall be born ſhall praiſe the Lord."

The propagation of Chriſtianity among thoſe who are benighted in ignorance, and enſlaved by ſin, is a bleſſing "worthy of all acceptation." But whether through the perverſeneſs of nature, the prevalence of example,

example, or the power of habit, men are regardleſs of its glorious truths, and indifferent to its ſaving doctrines, experience aſſures us that hitherto it has not produced effects proportionate, in the view of human reaſon, to the magnitude of the cauſe. For though it has unqueſtionably excited among the noble, and the great, the deſire of removing ignorance, and of diffuſing knowledge, yet, to the bulk of mankind, it has not been preſented ſo engaging in its nature, ſo eaſy in its conditions, ſo ſalutary in its influence, ſo intereſting in its rewards, and ſo awful in its puniſhments, as to be received with joyfulneſs, and practiſed with ſincerity.

Among the various modes of diſſeminating religion which piety has dictated, generoſity ſupported, and zeal carried into effect, none perhaps promiſes ſuch a harveſt to the ſower, as that of the benevolent inſtitution for which I am, this day, a willing advocate. Whether we conſider it as tending to civilize the manners, to meliorate the diſpoſitions, to eſtabliſh the principles, or to promote the ſalvation of the objects of it—in every point of view it attracts our notice, and challenges our approbation.

In great and manufacturing towns where the lower claſs of people abound, their wants are ſo many, and their neceſſities ſo urgent, that they have no thought but that of providing for the paſſing hour. They do not therefore attend either to the principles their children imbibe, or to the habits they contract; if they can ſatisfy their cravings of appetite, and preſerve their nakedneſs from cold, they, in their eſtimation, diſcharge the whole of their duty. Now what members of ſociety are ſuch children likely to become? Is it to be expected that they will be gentle in their tempers, upright in their conduct, and exemplary in their lives? This is NOT to be expected. For by whom is it to be taught?

In

In what manner is it to be acquired? But the inſtitution which I am to recommend to your bounty, is admirably calculated to ſupply this want of parental inſtruction. A number of children are brought together: they are told by their ſuperiors to whom they look up with reverence, and they obſerve from their equals whom they copy with emulation, that the purpoſe for which they are aſſembled is, to be inſtructed in their duty, that they may be made wiſe, in order to become good, and good, in order to be happy. The regularity which prevails makes, on their firſt entrance, a ſtrong impreſſion on their ſenſes; inſtead of diſturbance, they perceive quiet, inſtead of wayward inclination, implicit obedience. Another ſcene is now preſented to them. They are conducted to Church to worſhip an inviſible God: the ſolemnity of the ſcene, the reverence of the worſhippers, the alternate ſtanding, and kneeling, and ſitting which the Rubric enjoins, has a wonderful effect on their infant minds. Education now commences. I call it education, becauſe it is ſuch as their conditions demand, and their capacities comprehend. They are, with a few exceptions, ſoon taught to read ſo well as to take delight in learning; and when they have made ſuch a progreſs as to repeat our excellent Catechiſm, they feel a conſcious ſuperiority: they, by their regular attendance on divine worſhip, learn to diſtinguiſh between the exhortations made, the inſtructions conveyed, the prayers offered, and the thankſgivings poured forth; they are enabled to "pray with the underſtanding;" they contraſt in their own minds their preſent with their former ſtate; and with holy emulation, they ſtrive to excel each other, and to improve themſelves. I appeal for the truth of the aſſertion to you who ſuperintend the ſchools, inſtituted as theſe are to reſcue the minds of young perſons from the tyranny of ignorance, and prejudice, and vice. From ſuch beginnings it is that decency, good manners, and religion are expected to prevail: of the want of decency, of good manners, and religion we complain, BECAUSE the preſent gene-

ration

ration had not the advantages which Sunday-Schools ſo liberally, and ſo piouſly offer. The profanation of the Lord's-Day, ſo univerſally prevalent amongſt the lower orders of men throughout the whole kingdom, has excited, in the hearts of the pious, very alarming apprehenſions. To reject with ſuch careleſs indifference the gift, and to contemn with ſuch daring impiety the GIVER, may prepare for us a national puniſhment which amendment only can ſuſpend, and piety alone avert.

Of the objects for whoſe education I am now ſoliciting your bounty, how many are there, who, had they not reaped the advantages holden out to them by this moſt humane inſtitution, would perhaps have never viſited theſe ſacred walls, but when prompted by curioſity, directed by chance, induced by convenience, or impelled by neceſſity? How many of theſe little innocents might have lived utterly ignorant of the great truths of Chriſtianity, born in ſin, and hardened by depravity? How many of them might have lived, and died alas! without ever knowing of the glorious inheritance purchaſed for them by the death of Jeſus Chriſt?

One of the great advantages which will, we truſt, ariſe from Sunday-Schools is, that many of thoſe who are baptized into the profeſſion of our holy Religion, will both underſtand its nature, and fulfil its commands. How entirely unacquainted with the genius—how totally ignorant of the doctrines of Chriſtianity, many are "who call themſelves "Chriſtians," is too well known to us, whoſe duty it is to inſtruct them in the truth, and impreſs upon them the conditions of the Goſpel-Covenant. Can it then ſurprize you, that ſermons—the only mean almoſt of religious inſtruction—with whatever judgment they are compoſed, and with whatever eloquence delivered, ſhould "return void "unto" the preachers? It is lamented, I believe, by all the Clergy, more

eſpecially

eſpecially by thoſe who preach before popular aſſemblies, that they are ſeldom able by the union of refinement with ſimplicity, by tranſition from difficult to plain ſubjects, by the combination of pertinent reaſoning with earneſt exhortation, to prepare diſcourſes which will be heared, at once, with ſatisfaction by the more-enlightened, and with edification by the leſs-informed part of their auditory. The inſtitution which you are, I am perſuaded, diſpoſed individually to ſupport, will, we hope, remove this great obſtacle to the ſucceſs of public preaching; and the time, we truſt, in conſequence, is not far off when "all ſhall be taught, "from the leaſt to the greateſt, to know the Lord." The beauty of the ſervice, and the excellence of the diſcourſes by which the worſhip of our Church is, in general, pre-eminently diſtinguiſhed, will then be felt with pleaſure, and heared with effect. The Scriptures which, independent of their being divine compoſitions, have a claim to our attention, will then be received with delight, and ſtudied with diligence. The influence of the Goſpel will be written, as with a ſun-beam, on the conduct and the morals of its profeſſors, and "the people that ſhall be "born, ſhall, by your acts of charity, be taught to praiſe the Lord."

From this inſtitution, ſo ſimple in its deſign, ſo promiſing in its appearance, and ſo beneficial in its effects, we are juſtified in the expectation of promoting "peace on earth, and good-will towards men." When profligacy and vice had univerſally over-run the nation—when diſcourſes from the pulpit were either not heared, or not underſtood, or not regarded by multitudes—when the patrons of infidelity were boaſting that Chriſtianity failed of its effect, even amongſt thoſe, who, by their ignorance, were moſt likely to be influenced by its faſcinating ſanctions—when the pious were lamenting that degeneracy of manners which had borne down before it all the higher, and all the lower claſſes of the community—it pleaſed God, through the ſuggeſtion of an * Individual, leſs

 diſtinguiſhed

* *Mr. Raikes, of Gloceſter.*

diſtinguiſhed, it ſeems, by the ſplendor of his rank, than by the zeal of his piety, to deviſe an expedient to ſtem the torrent of licentiouſneſs—an expedient, by which, poſterity, though they may not be able to dry up the ſource of the evil, may yet avert its power, and check its rapidity. From this inſtitution, the policy of which has not been equalled by the plans of the moſt conſummate ſtateſman, we anticipate, with earneſt expectation, the happy, happy time, when engagements between man and man ſhall be kept inviolate—when our gaols ſhall be no longer crowded with criminals—and when each ſhall enjoy what he poſſeſſes ſecure "under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree." It is to this inſtitution which embraces the moral welfare, and the eternal ſalvation of all within its influence, that we look in part for the completion of theſe animating prophecies, that "the lamb ſhall lie down with the leopard—"that the knowledge of the Lord ſhall be ſpread abroad in the earth as "the waters cover the ſeas"—which, ſtripped of their metaphorical dreſs, ſignify, that the ferocity of man's nature ſhall be ſoftened—that violence and contention ſhall ceaſe—that genuine Chriſtianity ſhall be taught and believed, ſhall be ſtudied with ſerioufneſs, and obeyed with alacrity.

Be not diſcouraged, if your diſintereſted exertions ſhould, in ſome inſtances, fail of ſucceſs: be not diſcouraged, if the ſeed which you have caſt into the ground, has not, "like a grain of muſtard ſeed, quickly "become the largeſt of all herbs." You have had a barren and an obſtinate ſoil to cultivate; many of the objects of your attention are the children of thoſe who are * "pinched by want, expoſed to deluſion, "bewildered in the mazes of error, and involved in the darkneſs of "ignorance."

* *See a Letter by the Rev. Dr. PARR to the Diſſenters of Birmingham, which, for elegance of ſtyle, liberality of ſentiment, and powers of perſuaſion, is ſcarce equalled by any compoſition in the Engliſh language. Sold by Dilly, London.*

" ignorance." Upon the children of ſuch parents, you have cauſed the light of Revelation to ſhine; you are leading them " into the paths " of peace;" you are ſmoothing " the ways of Religion into ways of " pleaſantneſs," and are directing them into " the glorious liberty of the " children of God." What! if ye find ſome too dull to comprehend, or too froward to be taught; too unſteady to apply, or too vicious to be reclaimed—in the ſubordinate, yet honourable employment of " ſowing the ſeed of the word," ye were prepared to expect that " ſome " would fall upon the rock, and ſome among thorns;" but to animate your ardour, and ſupport your perſeverance, " others have fallen upon " good ground, and are daily bringing forth fruit, ſome thirty, ſome " ſixty, and ſome an hundred fold."

That all the permanent and ſolid good which your wiſhes embrace, may not be produced among the *riſing* generation, I am willing to admit. The obſtacles are in part foreſeen, and in part, I fear, we muſt rather be content with lightening than removing them. It will immediately occur to you, that the ſupineneſs, the ignorance, the profligacy of ſome of the parents will be ſtumbling blocks in the way of their children's improvement. But ſince many of them depend on YOU for their ſubſiſtence, be it your care to unite argument with entreaty, in perſuading them to frequent the ſervice of the Church, and to keep the Lord's-Day holy; to encourage their children, as well by their exemplary conduct, as require them by their parental authority, to attend the ſchool with diligence, and to conform to its injunctions with cheerfulneſs. Succeed in this, and the inſtitution of Sunday-Schools will defy every objection which petulance can urge, and malignity utter.

But however this be, it will not be deemed preſumptuous to ſay, that ſo much good-will be derived to many of theſe little ones who are drawing

 inſtruction

inſtruction from your bounty, that they will be enabled by underſtanding, and diſpoſed by inclination, to " teach and command their children, and " their houſehold after them to keep the way of the Lord, and to do " juſtice and judgment"—verifying in their literal ſenſe the words of the text, that " this ſhall be written for thoſe that come after, and that the " people that ſhall be born ſhall praiſe the Lord."

Again, I beſeech you, be not diſcouraged. Continue your exertions. The malignant blaſts of infidelity may aſſail, the pernicious blights of enthuſiaſm may deaden " the branches of this vine which GOD hath " planted." But let us pray God that " the wild-boar out of the wood " be reſtrained from rooting it up, and the wild beaſts of the field from " devouring it:"—if it decay through neglect, if it droop through inattention, " return, we beſeech thee, O God of Hoſts, look down from " Heaven, behold and viſit this vine!"

You will allow me, if you are indeed ſolicitous to reform the lives, and improve the principles of the lower claſſes of the community by this moſt benevolent inſtitution, to ſuggeſt to you, that, when you receive the children, who have been the objects of it, into your families, unleſs you preſerve alive in them the ſpirit of piety, which the practice of the ſchool infuſed, you yourſelves will UNDO by your negligence, what you are endeavouring to effect by your bounty. It is moſt devoutly to be wiſhed, that as ſoon as they leave the ſchool, that the ſame regular attendance on divine worſhip may be INDISPENSABLY required—that a part of the Sunday may be INVARIABLY devoted to the reading of ſuch books as will inſtruct them in religion, and confirm them in piety—that when they are arrived at a proper age, they may be brought to the Holy Sacrament, and habituated to the obſervance of all the duties of a chriſtian life. There is one thing more which I would moſt earneſtly recommend;

recommend; without which *your* bounty will be ineffectual, and *their* improvement incomplete—aſſemble your family every evening to worſhip God; you will then become to theſe children inſtructors, guardians, parents; you will then, in a qualified ſenſe, become "preachers "of righteouſneſs, a nation of prieſts."

I will treſpaſs a little longer on your patience whilſt I exhort you to contribute to the ſupport of the Sunday-Schools, not merely by acts of charity, but by the exertion of your authority, and the influence of your ſuperintendence.

It may not be improper to obſerve to you, that this excellent inſtitution is ſupported by ſoliciting, in this place, your charity once in two years. You are here exhorted to contribute, "each according to your "power:" if you have much, it is not doubted, but "you will give "plenteouſly; if you have little," it is hoped, that "you will give cheer-"fully of that little." In this mode of applying for your bounty, the opportunity of being oſtentatious is refuſed. Yet the inſtitution ſurely will not ſuffer, becauſe you are not urged by importunity, or impelled by emulation. How much a public charity is benefited by raiſing the conſequence, by flattering the vanity, by alarming the pride of the people ſolicited, is clear and obvious. Your ſupport is requeſted from no ſuch motives. What you will give can only be known with certainty to God, and to yourſelves. The voice of fame will not proclaim your liberality. I wiſh you to exerciſe your charity from a higher principle. I requeſt you to conſider that "what you have, you have received," and that you are accountable for the diſtribution of it. I requeſt you to conſider, that your reward in heaven will be in proportion to your charity this day on earth. I beſeech you to bear in mind, that ſeldom has your bounty been ſupplicated upon an occaſion ſo highly laudable, and ſo extenſively

uſeful,

uſeful, as that which now calls for your attention and your ſupport. It is to contribute your aſſiſtance towards the rendering upwards of two hundred children ſerviceable to the community, happy in themſelves, and "heirs of the kingdom of heaven." Such being the cauſe you are required to promote, ye will all, I pray God, this day contribute in ſuch a manner, that ye will not be aſhamed, when your bounty ſhall be made manifeſt, at the day of judgment.

But it is not only by your liberality that this moſt chriſtian inſtitution will flouriſh. In order to diffuſe its influence, and promote its ſucceſs, permit me to exhort thoſe of you who are in a higher ſtation of life, to give the ſchools ſometimes, if not the ſanction of your preſence, at leaſt the advantage of your enquiries. Nothing will ſo effectually maintain order, and enforce regularity. And let no man think ſo highly of himſelf as to be above this office of kindneſs, this inſtance of condeſcenſion. Can he be better employed, more ſatisfactorily to himſelf, more acceptably to HIM from whom both riches and diſtinctions are derived, than in ſuggeſting amendments, in rebuking negligence, in countenancing induſtry?

To conclude. You are now called upon by your liberality, to impreſs the riſing generation, and its remoteſt poſterity, with juſt principles, ſound morals, and true religion. Caſt your eyes for a moment on a neighbouring nation, and you will be then convinced that I am exhorting you to conſult your intereſt, as much as to diſcharge your duty. Hear the clamorous voice of the populace demanding ſlaughter!—ſee their hands ſtained with blood! A Revolution, even of the gentleſt kind, in theſe kingdoms, is, we hope, remote; it is however an act of wiſdom to reſtrain the turbulent paſſions of the multitude, which can be no way ſo effectually done, as by the ſupport of this moſt benevolent inſtitution.

And

And whilſt, at the ſame time, you are making them peaceable citizens, and honeſt neighbours, you are preparing them for an admiſſion into a better life, which will continue when "time ſhall be no more." Look then upon theſe children with eyes of compaſſion; and, as God hath bleſſed you, impart your bleſſings unto them. Look upon theſe children with eyes of compaſſion; and as it is your privilege to be educated in the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, ſhew yourſelves to be ſo actuated by its principles, as, by the application of a ſmall part of your incomes, to encourage, and as it were, to beguile them into a concern for their everlaſting intereſt, and to make them "wiſe unto ſalvation." And remember that you are again to behold them at the judgment ſeat of Chriſt. At that tremendous period, when you are each about to enter upon an unalterable ſtate, when others are beſet with the helpleſs whom they have oppreſſed, and the orphans they have injured, may you be encompaſſed with theſe children proclaiming your goodneſs, and pleading for your acceptance! Amidſt their praiſes of your bounty, and their prayers for your ſalvation, may you be welcomed by the Judge of the World with this tranſporting invitation—"enter together with them into the joy of "your Lord!"

That every perſon here, according as his circumſtances enable him to contribute, may, this day by his beneficence, entitle himſelf to ſuch high approbation of his conduct, and reward of his merit, God of his infinite mercy grant for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. AMEN.

THE END.

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To conclude. You are now called upon by your liberality, to impreſs the riſing generation, and its remoteſt poſterity, with juſt principles, ſound morals, and true religion. Caſt your eyes for a moment on a neighbouring nation, and you will be then convinced that I am exhorting you to conſult your intereſt, as much as to diſcharge your duty. Hear the clamorous voice of the populace demanding ſlaughter!—ſee their hands ſtained with blood! A Revolution, even of the gentleſt kind, in theſe kingdoms, is, we hope, remote; it is however an act of wiſdom to reſtrain the turbulent paſſions of the multitude, which can be no way ſo effectually done, as by the ſupport of this moſt benevolent inſtitution.

And

And whilſt, at the ſame time, you are making them peaceable citizens, and honeſt neighbours, you are preparing them for an admiſſion into a better life, which will continue when "time ſhall be no more." Look then upon theſe children with eyes of compaſſion; and, as God hath bleſſed you, impart your bleſſings unto them. Look upon theſe children with eyes of compaſſion; and as it is your privilege to be educated in the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, ſhew yourſelves to be ſo actuated by its principles, as, by the application of a ſmall part of your incomes, to encourage, and as it were, to beguile them into a concern for their everlaſting intereſt, and to make them "wiſe unto ſalvation." And remember that you are again to behold them at the judgment ſeat of Chriſt. At that tremendous period, when you are each about to enter upon an unalterable ſtate, when others are beſet with the helpleſs whom they have oppreſſed, and the orphans they have injured, may you be encompaſſed with theſe children proclaiming your goodneſs, and pleading for your acceptance! Amidſt their praiſes of your bounty, and their prayers for your ſalvation, may you be welcomed by the Judge of the World with this tranſporting invitation—"enter together with them into the joy of "your Lord!"

That every perſon here, according as his circumſtances enable him to contribute, may, this day by his beneficence, entitle himſelf to ſuch high approbation of his conduct, and reward of his merit, God of his infinite mercy grant for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. AMEN.

THE END.

Lately published by the same Author.

A SERMON,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CHARITY-SCHOOL,

Inscribed by Permission to the Lord Bishop of Chester.

Preached in the Parish Church of Sunderland.

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